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ABSTRACT

This paper comprises a compilation of information on the positional mobility and migration of superintendents and superintendent-principals within the Oregon public school system. The author reports on studies of 43 superintendents who left their positions in one year. He analyzes (1) the turnover rate and the school system size, (2) the mobility patterns, (3) the nature of the subsequent offices to which the superintendents moved, and (4) the migration between superintendencies by eight superintendents who moved to other district superintendencies. The author notes that the superintendency in a small district is readily interchangeable with the principalship of or a subordinate central office position in a larger school district. (JF)

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W.W. Charters, Jr.

March 1972

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Base-Line Data

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In the school year of 1966-67 there were 226 individuals listed as superintendents or superintendent-principals in the public schools of Oregon; 43 of these individuals (19%) had left their positions by the following year. This paper compiles certain information with regard to these superintendents, with particular attention to their positional mobility and migration within the Oregon public school system.

The information was drawn from the Oregon Administrator Data Pool established by CASEA a number of years ago to facilitate research on the careers of educational personnel. The data are based on rosters of teachers and administrators in Oregon public schools compiled each year by the Oregon Department of Public Instruction, augmented, coded, and cross-checked against Oregon school directories for the relevant years by the CASEA staff and stored on ready-access computer tape at the University of Oregon. The 1966-67 information represents the base-line data in the pool; hence our interest in summarizing the information for this particular year.

The Oregon Superintendency

Given the great disparity in the size and nature of school districts across the state, the managerial responsibility of the superintendency position is far from uniform. At the one extreme is the executive position in the Portland public school system, consisting in 1966-67 of 75,000 students and 3,600 certificated personnel. At the other extreme are a number of districts consisting of

a single elementary or high school with fewer than 100 students and a handful of teachers, in which the superintendent is both principal and executive officer to the board, and possibly a teacher as well.

The very small districts predominate. (See Table 1.) Nearly one-third of the 226 superintendents in the 1966-67 list managed school systems of less than 400 students. Almost half of the superintendents (46%) had direct responsibility for managing one of the schools in the district as well as serving as the district's executive officer. Thus, a bare majority of Oregon superintendencies had reached the level of managerial responsibility normally associated with the office.

Table 1

Oregon School Superintendencies by District Size and Type
1966-67

SIZE*	TYPE				
	Elementary District	Union High District	Joint District	Unified District	Total
4000 and over	1	-	1	17	19
1000 - 3999	8	4	7	46	65
400 - 999	18	8	2	38	66
Under 400	21	15	1	39	76
Total	48	27	11	140	226

*Average Daily Membership

Despite the extensive district consolidation that has occurred over the past years in Oregon, a substantial number of districts were still organized as elementary or union high school districts. These tend to comprise the smaller school systems, but a few are quite large. Too, a number of the unified districts are very small. Occasionally, a single individual serves as the superintendent of both the elementary district and the union high school district in the same locale; there were 11 such cases in the 1966-67 data.

Vacancies and School System Size

As noted at the outset of the paper, 43 superintendents vacated their positions between 1966-67 and 1967-68. This represents a turnover of 19%, a figure identical to that for the preceding pair of years, for which we have partial data, and consistent with the percentage typically reported in the literature for superintendents.[1] Six of the vacancies occurred, however, as the result of district consoldiation; hence, these positions did not become available for refilling.

No systematic relationship was found between vacancies and school system size. They occurred in all size categories at about the same rate, with no consistent trend discernible. Given the disproportionate number of small districts in the state, of course, the bulk of the vacated positions appeared among them. Only 14 superintendencies occurred in systems with over 1000 students that year. The data are shown in Table 2.

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[1] Earl E. Mosier and John E. Baker, "Midwest Superintendents on the Move," Nation's Schools, 1952, 49 (Jan.), 446-448.

Table 2

Vacancies by District Size
1966-69

Size*	Positions	Vacancies**	Rate
4000 and over	19	4	.210
1000 - 3999	65	11	.169
400 - 999	66	12	.182
Under 400	76	16	.210
Total	226	43	.190

*Average Daily Membership
**Vacated between 1966-67 and 1967-68

Mobility Patterns

Twenty-three of the 43 superintendents moves to a different position within the public schools of Oregon. No sustained effort was made to trace the location of the remaining 20. From incidental sources we know that two superintendents left the state for major educational positions elsewhere, one joined the faculty of a state university, one entered a doctoral program in the state, and one became superintendent of an Intermediate Education District. Considering the relatively advanced age of some, a few may have retired or died. In any event, if they "disappeared" from either administrative or teaching positions in Oregon's public schools in 1967-68, they left the system of educational positions with which we are concerned.

The subsequent office. The offices to which the 23 superintendents moved are shown in Table 3. Perhaps the most striking observation is that only one-third of them moved to another district superintendency. Nine took a principalship, four a subordinate central office position, and two an assistant principalship or teaching position. Thus, if one solely considers office titles, a substantial extent of career "retrogression" is observed among the individuals.

Table 3

Subsequent Offices of Superintendents
Who Changed to Another Public School Position in Oregon
1966-67 to 1967-68

Office in 1967-68	Same District	Different District	Total
Superintendent	-	8	8
Central Office (assistant superintendent, coordinator)	2	2	4
High School Principal	1	1	2
Elementary School Principal	5	2	7
Assistant Principal, high school	-	1	1
Teacher	-	1	1
Total	8	15	23

Some of the apparent retrogression, however, is attributable to an exceptional circumstance: district consolidation. Six of the persons who assumed principalships did so when the small elementary or high school districts of which they had been superintendent-principals were reorganized as part of a larger unified district. All of them stayed in the reorganized district in the succeeding year, typically as principal of the same school.

These cases aside, those who took a non-superintendent position usually moved to a different school district to do so. There were two instances, however, in which the individual remained in the same district as an assistant superintendent under the incoming chief executive.

Superintendents who were found in a "lesser" office in the subsequent year differed in certain respects from those who moved to another district superintendency. Their initial positions tended to be in the very small elementary or high school districts or in the smaller of the unified districts; 12 of the 15 had had managerial responsibility for one of the schools of the system (i.e., they were superintendent-principals). The median size of their systems was 390 students.

By contrast, those who took another superintendency more often originated in larger, unified districts (median size 660 students) and moved to another unified district. Only three of the eight had been superintendent-principals.

The trade-offs involved in the apparently retrogressive moves can be illustrated by the following six cases of individuals who took "lesser" administrative posts in different school districts. In some instances we have salary

figures for them.

Case 1. Age 40, superintendent-principal of unified district of 290 students. Became principal of a high school of 350 students in a unified district of 1,300. Salary gain of $700.

Case 2. Age 50, superintendent-principal of elementary district of 350 students. Became principal of elementary school of 525 students in an elementary district of 2,000.

Case 3. Age 47, superintendent-principal of unified district of 390 students. Became principal of elementary school of 180 students in elementary district of 475. Salary loss of $500.

Case 4. Age 33, superintendent-principal of unified district of 130 students. Became assistant principal in high school of 570 students in unified district of 2,600. Salary gain of $1,000.

Case 5. Age 42, superintendent of elementary district of 2,100 students. Became assistant superintendent in unified district of 6,000. Salary gain of $2,000.

Case 6. Age 58, superintendent of joint elementary-high school district of 460 students. Became central office "coordinator" in unified district of 2,400.

Only one of these cases represents a clear instance of downward occupational mobility: Case 3.[2] The others involved moves to administrative positions in larger school systems, and if the moves were to principalships, they involved responsibility for larger organizational units. Hence, it cannot be said that the assumption of a subordinate office necessarily implies retrogression in the administrative career.

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[2]Not included in these illustrative cases is the superintendent-principal of a small (ADM=183) district who took a teaching position in a much larger district nearby.

Migration between superintendencies. Details for the eight Oregon superintendents who moved in 1967-68 to another district superintendency are shown in Table 4. Several facts are apparent here. Most of the moves entailed at least a modest "improvement" in circumstance, either from the standpoint of salary or school system size, or both. The most substantial "improvements" occurred among the superintendents who were under 40 years old, the least among the four in their middle fifties. Case 8 suggests an instance of downward mobility.

In spite of the "improvements," though, it is apparent that the individuals who originated in extremely small superintendent-principalships moved to similarly marginal positions and those who originated in superintendencies of the larger systems (over 1,000 students) moved to similarly large systems. In short, as sketchy as these data are, they suggest that at least two distinct "circles" of administrative positions existed in the state. We will return to the point below.

The geography of the moves is displayed on the accompanying map. (See Figure 1.) Obviously, physical distance within the state was little deterrent to the migration of superintendents. To the extent the eight moves suggest "attraction" to the northwestern sector of the state, it is attributable to the high density of districts and superintendencies in that region.

Discussion

The several sets of data reported here suggest not only that superintendency positions are highly heterogeneous in Oregon but that the categorical

Table 4

Salary and District Size Differences for Eight Oregon Superintendents Who Moved to Another Superintendency 1966-67 to 1967-68

Case No.	Age	1966-67 Office*	1966-67 District Size**	1967-68 Office*	1967-68 District Size**	Salary Difference
1	28	Supt-Princ. Unit	86	Supt-Princ. Unit	429	+$1600
2	36	Supt-Princ. Unit	118	Supt-Princ. Unit	401	no data
3	34	Supt. Unit	171	Supt-Princ. Unit	500	+$2500
4	54	Supt-Princ. Elem.	158	Supt-Princ. Elem.	270	+ $600
5	56	Supt. Unit	1159	Supt. Unit	1570	+$1000
6	39	Supt. Unit	1284	Supt. Unit	3249	+$5250
7	55	Supt. Unit	1776	Supt. Unit	2187	-$1050
8	55	Supt. Unit	2995	Supt. Unit	1687	-$1250

*Unit = Unified district; Elem. = Elementary district
**Average Daily Membership

distinction between "superintendent" and "principal" (or even "head teacher") is a finely graduated one and not categorical at all. An individual who bears the title of superintendent in a district consisting of a small high school, of which he is principal, and perhaps one or two elementary schools is barely distinguishable in terms of the managerial responsibility he carries from a person who is exclusively a principal. Indeed, our records show that such individuals often classify themselves as principals rather than as superintendents.

"Superintendents" in the smallest tier of Oregon school districts hardly correspond in function to the image invoked in the literature when the superintendency is discussed. Reference to the administrative career, for example, describes the ladder of offices--teacher, principal, superintendent--up which an individual climbs and portrays subsequent mobility as "horizontal"--from one superintendency to another. Those who reach the "chief school officer" position are pictured as committed to the superintendency career. But as our data suggest, the superintendency in a small school district is readily interchangeable with the principalship or subordinate central office position in a larger district. For the "chief school officers" of the marginally small districts, the commitment may be less to a career in the superintendency than to a career in school administration generally.

At what point in scope of managerial responsibility does the superintendency differentiate from school administration generally? While the question deserves further study, our tabulations indicate that a point of discontinuity in responsibility appears when a school system reaches 800 to 1,000 students in size. Above 800, almost no superintendent carried direct responsibility for managing a school; below 800, over three-quarters of them were superintendent-principals. Above 800, no superintendent moved to a high-school or elementary-school principalship when he changed positions; below 800, superintendents were twice as likely to move to a principalship as to another superintendency.

Tentatively, we propose that the superintendency emerges as a distinctive administrative office in Oregon school systems when the system reaches 600

students or more in size and when the person filling the superintendent's position no longer has direct managerial responsibility for one of the schools in the system. By this operational criterion, half of the individuals covered by our data were not in "true" superintendency positions in 1966-67. Only 112 of the 226 could be so regarded.[3]

Whenever the separation can most reasonably be made, it is possible that the administrative positions represent distinct types, or "circles," of superintendencies. On one side of the line, incumbents may define themselves as school building administrators and, at best, middle management; on the other side, they may regard themselves as chief executives of school systems --i.e., as superintendents. Conceivably, the persons who circulate through the positions trace out quite different career patterns--differing in modes of entry, considerations of advancement, and conditions of departure. The possibility bears investigation.

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[3]The number in 1971-72 also was 112.

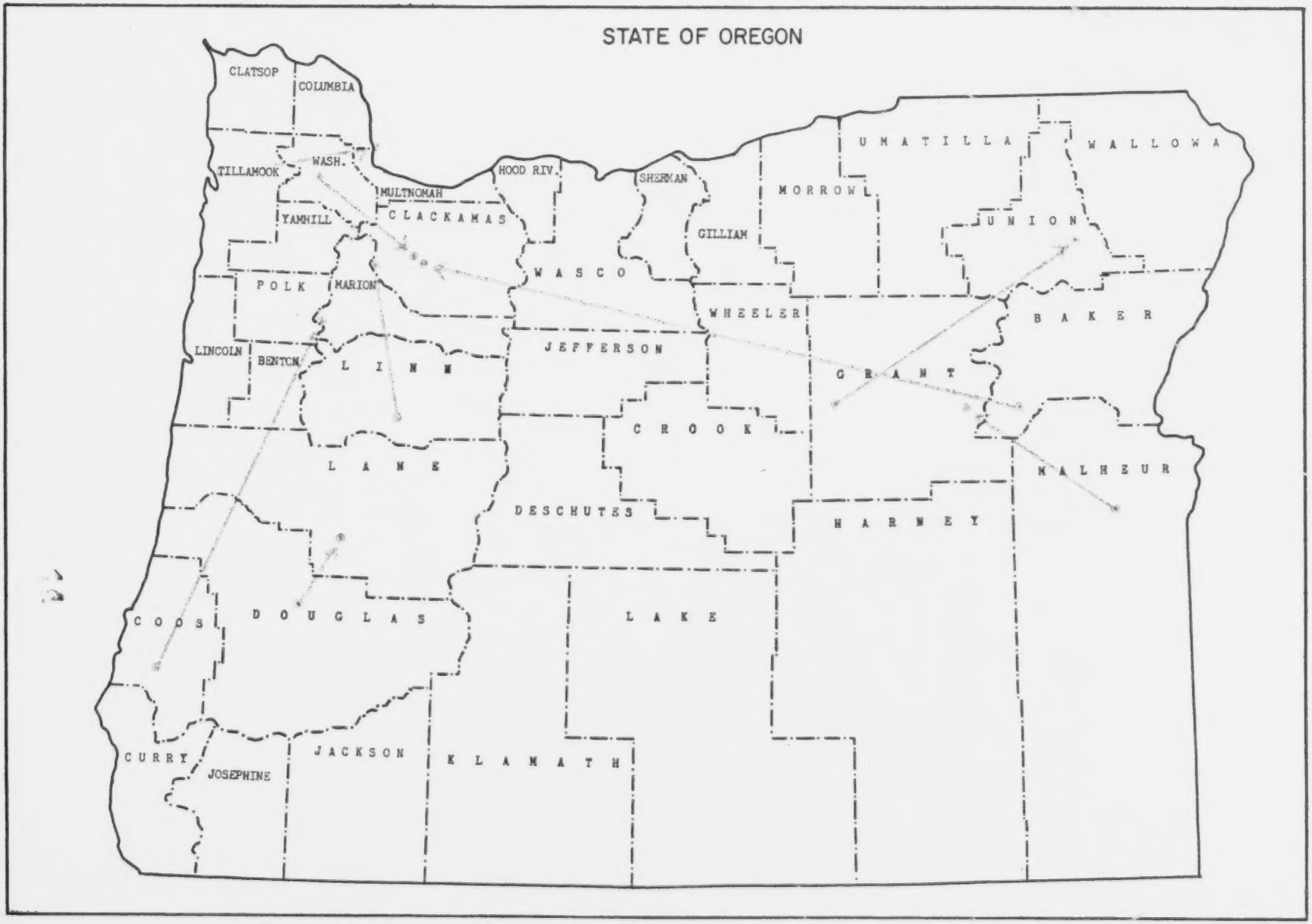

Fig. 1. In-State Migration of Oregon School Superintendents
(1966-67 to 1967-68 Data)